

HOUSING COMMISSION OFFICIAL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2020, 4:00 PM
VIDEO CONFERENCE

Members Present: Robert Abraham, Member
Pedro Alanis, Member
Jeff Arndt, Member
Dr. Paul Furukawa, Member
Jessica O. Guerrero, Chair
Richard Milk on behalf of David Nisivoccia, Member
Susan Richardson, Member
Sarah Sanchez, Member

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Lori Houston, *City Manager's Office*;
Verónica R. Soto, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Edward Gonzales, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Jameene Williams, *City Attorney's Office*;
Ian Benavidez, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Sara Wamsley, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Irma Duran, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Allison Shea, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Edith Merla, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Laura Salinas, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Munirih Jester, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Kristin Flores, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Crystal Grafft, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;
Gloria Villela-Reyes, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*

- **Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order by Chair Jessica O. Guerrero at 4:03 PM.
 - **Roll Call** – Irma Duran called the roll. At the time when roll call was conducted, eight (8) members were present representing a quorum.
 - **Public Comments** – Guerrero proceeded to public comment. Duran announced zero (0) residents signed up to speak, submitted written comment, nor left voicemails for public comment. Sara Wamsley thanked residents for joining the meeting and gave a reminder that the Housing Commissions' public comments guide and instructions can be found on the meeting agenda and that the next regular meeting is on September 23rd.
- 1. Item #1: Approval of Statement Letter from the Housing Commission to the City Manager Regarding the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget.**
Chair Guerrero requested Commissioner Alanis to read the proposed statement letter.

Commissioner Alanis read the drafted Housing Commission statement on the City's Proposed Budget as follows:

The primary charge of the San Antonio Housing Commission is to serve as the public oversight Board to guide the implementation of the Mayor's Housing Policy Task Force (MHPTF) recommendations. As such, the Housing Commission is recommending an increase to the City's year over year funding levels committed to affordable housing programs and initiatives as part of the City's FY 2021 Adopted Budget.

Our Commissioners are well aware of the financial burden the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our local economy and impacts to the City's annual budget process. We are also equally aware of the devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our lowest wage residents, who are disproportionately people of color who prior to COVID-19 were struggling to meet basic household obligations. In 2018, the Mayor's Housing Policy Task Force affirmed that San Antonio residents were experiencing housing insecurity and affordability challenges like never before in areas such as displacement, affordability of housing and utilities, quality of available housing, and the accessibility of affordable housing. Fast forward to 2020, COVID-19 has made the pressures on our most vulnerable exponentially worse.

As Commissioners carry on this critical charge we are committed to ensuring all San Antonio residents, regardless of income, have healthy places to live that promote dignity, choice, and security. We have heard from countless residents, advocate groups, resident associations, community leaders, institutional experts, and others with a unifying theme that our housing system in San Antonio requires continuous improvement, investment, and leadership. Therefore, our commissioning body is respectfully requesting that the City of San Antonio increase its overall investment in affordable housing programs and initiatives in the FY 2021 Adopted Budget in order to address these challenges.

Members of the Housing Commission are available to meet with you and your staff should you like any further discussion or insights regarding this request.

Alanis explained that the statement's intention is to keep the pressure for continual investment in affordable housing. Alanis stated with his eighteen years in business, the challenges and limited federal program funding is not solely enough for this endeavor. Affordable housing is city infrastructure that needs continual investment just like roads and sidewalks. With this letter, Alanis stated he hoped to continue the important funding to non-profits and people creating opportunities for vulnerable communities.

Commissioner Abraham asked if this was the standard procedure to ask for funding or if there should be a percentage tied. Alanis explained that the MHPTF had steady success in finding investment sources throughout the community. With COVID-19 there were significantly less local sources to contribute, not only monetarily but other resources. As such no percentage or specific value can be applied, but more pressure and stressing the importance of the community needs.

Commissioner Furukawa motioned to move forward with the statement's adoption. He felt that the letter urged Council not to reduce funding but didn't specifically recommend areas to increase. Furukawa suggested strengthening the statement by detailing how funding key areas in housing could prevent other hardships. He stated that the letter was a bit subtle in

asking for funding.

Commissioner Arndt supported the statement. He stated that with the proposed adoption of the budget being this Thursday it would be too late to place specifics in the current letter but agreed that a more detailed statement would be better. Arndt recommended the Commission keep in mind an earlier timeline for future Council budget considerations.

Furukawa asked where, from the housing budget reductions, would the funds be reallocated and what key area should the Commission be most interested in protecting. Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager, replied \$5.2 million was budgeted in the Risk Mitigation/Emergency Housing Assistance Program for this current year. Along with concerns brought by the Commission and Council, the proposed budget is to be increased to \$21.9 million for EHAP. Increased funding was provided with \$10 million from Corona Virus Relief Funds, cuts to SAHT funds, CDBG funds, and affordable housing budget. Houston stated that if there is additional state or federal funding, it will go toward the line items that funding was redirected from.

Guerrero inquired about a HUD press release regarding more CDBG funds being released. Houston stated that the HUD press release was not included in the \$21.9 million proposed budget allocations but new CDBG fund allocations will be taken to Council after more in-depth discussions.

Arndt thanked City staff for listening to the Commission's comments and response.

Commissioner Sanchez thanked Alanis for drafting the statement and suggested to humanize the letter by placing a snapshot of how many people have already been helped by EHAP and who they are.

Commissioner Richardson suggested a statement requesting the City for a continual increase to their affordable housing programs and initiatives.

Alanis agreed that continuous investment in affordable housing is necessary. He recognized and thanked the City for the additional EHAP funding but suggested for incremental increases to be budgeted for current programs and development of new ones.

Guerrero thanked Alanis for drafting the statement and was happy to see the Commissioners with their expertise in agreement. Guerrero agreed to have specificity and the human impact included. She stated is most concerned with the EHAP funding due to the longevity of the pandemic.

Wamsley confirmed the captured edits to the statement provided by the Commissioners:

- 1) Snapshot of families helped by EHAP including specific families for highlight
- 2) Continual investment increase for programs and initiatives
- 3) Fully pursue additional avenues for housing program funding

Commissioner Paul Furukawa motioned to approve the edited statement. Commissioner Jeff Arndt seconded motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Jeff Arndt motioned to approve Chair Guerrero to read the statement at a

City Council Session. Commissioner Susan Richardson seconded motion. Motion carried unanimously.

2. Item #2: Discussion of Methods of Conducting Public Input about the COVID-19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) Review.

Chair Guerrero requested Sara Wamsley, Interim Affordable Housing Administrator, to present.

Wamsley stated that recommendations for the EHAP review process were first developed in the outreach working group containing: Commissioner Richardson, Commissioner Arndt, Commissioner Furukawa, Chair Guerrero, Anayanse Garza, Teri Castillo, Nikki Johnson, and Maureen Galindo. The goal of input is to identify opportunities to improve EHAP through dialogue with applicants, intake partners, and the public. Recommendations from the outreach working group were to create an outreach survey and have one or more in-person meeting(s).

A survey would give an opportunity for respondents to opt in for further in-person input and would be distributed through Council offices, EHAP applicants, neighborhood associations, homelessness service providers, Commissioners, and outreach working group. The dedicated meeting(s) would strive to be more interactive with a potential use of a polling mechanism. After the survey and meeting(s) a detailed write-up would be reported.

Wamsley stated the types of people and information that would be reviewed would be residents, including landlords, with their experience accessing/using EHAP; staff's analytics of EHAP usage, goals, and eviction overview; and intake partners experiences and observations.

Wamsley requested the finalized Commission's recommendation should include timeline for the input process. She noted the timeline should provide enough time to implement a survey and/or identify meeting participant and the outreach working group preferred a rigorous thorough review process over a speedy process.

Arndt specified that polling is done at the (VIA) town hall meetings not the board meetings. He also noted that though rigor is preferred, speedy rigor is beneficial so that changes can be implemented in a timely manner.

Richardson noted that Council mentioned that with the start of workforce development training, the City will be reaching out to EHAP recipients for interest. A brief 3-5 question survey could be placed alongside that follow-up. Verónica R. Soto, Director of Neighborhood & Housing Services, stated NHSD provided the Economic Development Department (EDD), which is leading the workforce development training, a list of EHAP clients. Soto stated EDD has contracted the outreach process for interest in the training only and may not allow for the additional survey as the contract may need to be amended. However, she would contact EDD and follow-up.

Richardson asked for clarification of the EHAP client contact process from EDD. Soto stated that outreach to the clients are not being done by City staff but have been contracted out by EDD. As the contract may only stipulate to outreach for the training only, the additional EHAP survey would not fall under the contract but would see if EDD's partners would be able to conduct the survey.

Alanis asked for clarification of the outreach working group's definition of rigor versus speed and the group members. Wamsley stated the outreach working group had a combination of Commissioners (Guerrero, Arndt, Richardson, Furukawa) and the public (Garza, Castillo, Johnson, Galindo). Wamsley stated that her perception of rigor versus speed was to develop an input process that would be robust in feedback details rather than something that needed to be on a strict deadline (i.e. end of October) but deferred to the Workgroup members for additional verification.

Richardson stated that the input process would be more toward depth of input; not all EHAP clients needed to be contacted but a sizeable sampling would suffice.

Guerrero stated that alongside the Risk Mitigation Program Stakeholder Group work, ensuring the effectiveness of the program was a key factor. With determining the program effectiveness, engagement with RMP clients was important for a different depth of understanding in conjunction with the quantitative data (i.e. number of clients assisted, income levels).

Alanis asked staff regarding utilization of input results and if EHAP was to be continued after federal dollars were expended at the end of the year. He agreed with Arndt that if the results are to be used to improve EHAP, the data needs to be speedy to give opportunity to change. Alanis stated the input should balance rigor and speed, so staff can utilize feedback for improvement.

Richardson commented that EHAP would potentially revert back to RMP and that the input results would affect the program even after the end of the year.

Guerrero agreed that the additional data collection would benefit the program in whatever shape it would take long term as it would account for current and ongoing needs.

Ian Benavidez, Assistant Director, stated staff mainly needs a determination from Commissioners of what data should be focused on being collected and the types of tools being used for collection. Timeframe is critical as it may shift the types of tools that can be used within time limit.

Alanis stated that a mass initial survey would maybe have 3-5% response. He asked with the initial responses, if a reassessment and refinement of questions could be done and amended survey be launched. Benavidez and Wamsley agreed that the approach could be done with the help of the Commission and subcommittees.

Guerrero stated that before the pandemic, the RMP Stakeholder Group started collecting data and experiences. She suggested the information could be used to formulate survey questions or input direction. Soto asked for clarification if the experience Guerrero was looking for was the client's experience during/after the application process or what their story/experience was before the process. Guerrero stated the full experience timeline would be important as it what the root causes of the City's housing issues stem. Soto expressed that a full experience of a client would be hard to condense to a 3-5 question survey. Guerrero replied that she believed a survey could encompass the experiences and did not have to be over 100 questions if questions were shaped in a concise manner.

Sanchez stated that survey fatigue happens after 2-3 minutes into a survey, depending on length of question and quantity of questions. After that timeframe, survey takers will lose interest.

Arndt concurred with Sanchez and favored focusing on EHAP's process and result. He stated though root cause is important, succinct program evaluation is needed. A survey may not be 3-5 questions, but should be finished before survey fatigue sets in.

Richardson agreed that a good amount of data could be extracted to assist in improving the program with a compact concise survey, an evaluation from everyone that had a hand in requesting, processing, or being affected by EHAP.

Guerrero agreed that the survey should be building a relationship with its community and not challenging it with fatigue. She also noted that a combined effort with EDD may help to reach the people at the same time as to not overwhelm them with repeating/competing efforts. Soto stated she is in constant contact with other departments to ensure other departmental call center staff are responding as a unified front. Data will also be recorded of EHAP clients requesting workforce training. Along with the numbers, testimonials are being recorded to humanize the data. Guerrero agreed that the effort sounds promising and would like to know more how to support the combined departmental efforts.

Abraham asked if a question could be developed to show where the client was in the EHAP process. Benavidez stated with the Commissioners' feedback from this session, a draft survey can be created and sent to Commissioners for refinement.

Guerrero stated if not overstepping quorum issues, the outreach work group may exchange survey refinement notes with other Commissioners to help speed up the process.

Wamsley confirmed input review structure provided by the Commissioners:

- 1) Brief survey that should be no longer than three (3) minutes to complete
- 2) Focused on EHAP evaluation (Access, Usage, and Outcome Experiences)
- 3) Commissioners would like to leverage other outreach to combine efforts
- 4) Finalized survey brought for Commissioner approval before launch
- 5) Results brought to Commissioners for recommendations

Commissioner Jeff Arndt motioned to move forward on public input review as reviewed by Wamsley. Commissioner Pedro Alanis seconded motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Closing-

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned without contest at 5:26 PM.